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ABSTRACT

In 1990, a survey was conducted of colleges in the Mid-Plains Technical Community College (MPTCC) area to determine the most effective organizational structure and staffing patterns for institutional research and to assess the kinds of information most needed. The survey instrument was mailed to 30 administrators in the Area Office and at Mid-Plains Community College and McCook Community College (Nebraska). Study findings, based on a 96.7% response rate, included the following: (1) 75.9% of the administrators felt that there was a need to organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCC area; (2) 48.3% supported an organizational structure consisting of one Area Office staff person with designated campus contacts, while 37.9% supported the appointment of individual campus institutional research personnel; and (3) over 75% of the respondents felt that the most needed and important areas of research were collection of data to influence state legislation, research to secure federal grants, needs assessments, public relations, institutional effectiveness and outcomes, and market surveys. The survey instrument is included. (GFW)

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AN ASSESSMENT OF HOW TO ORGANIZE EFFECTIVELY THE FUNCTION OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IN THE MID-PLAINS TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE AREA

Governance and Management Seminar

by

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A Practicum Report presented to Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

January, 1991

Abstract of a Practicum Report Presented to Nova University in Partial Fullfillment for the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

AN ASSESSMENT OF HOW TO ORGANIZE EFFECTIVELY THE FUNCTION OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IN THE MID-PLAINS TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE AREA

by

Ford M. Craig

January, 1991

The purpose of this study was to assess how to effectively organize the function of institutional research in the Mid-Plains Technical Community College Area (MPTCC Area). The problem which prompted this study was that information required for a variety of purposes - regional accreditation, demographic trends, administrative decision-making - either had not been collected or, if available, was sometimes not well-organized. Thus, the research question involved how to effectively organize, including staffing patterns and kinds of information most needed, the function on institutional research in the MPTCC Area.

Several procedures were involved in the assessment. A survey instrument with two general questions and three categorical areas was developed. The instrument was validated and mailed to thirty Area Office, Mid-Plains Community College, and McCook Community College administrators designated by the MPTCC Area President.

Results were analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics and were reported in narrative and tabular format.

Findings, based on a 96.7 percent response rate, were used to derive these conclusions: (1) administrators favored the organization of institutional research; and (2) administrators favored a centralized staffing pattern. Administrators identified the following types of research as being most needed: (1) needs assessments; (2) public relations; (3) effectiveness/outcomes studies; (4) data to influence legislation; and (5) market surveys.

Recommendations included dissemination of the practicum information to the MPTCC Area Board and appropriate administrators for potential action. Other recommendations identified the kinds of institutional research deemed most necessary by the administrators surveyed.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance

The Mid-Plains Technical Community College Area (MPTCCA) serves eighteen counties in west-central Nebraska and consists of two colleges with three separate campus locations: McCook Community College, Mid-Plains Community College - Vocational Technical Division, and Mid-Plains Community College - McDonald-Belton Campus. These institutions serve traditional and non-traditional students who come from an area of Nebraska characterized by farming and ranching.

McCook Community College (MCC), located in McCook, Nebraska, has a full-time student enrollment of 444 and a part-time student enrollment of 531. Mid-Plains Community College - Vocational Technical Division (MPCC-VTD), located in North Platte, Nebraska, serves 250 full-time students and 829 part-time students. Mid-Plains Community College - McDonald-Belton Campus (MPCC-MB), also located in North Platte, has 447 full-time students and 501 part-time students.

MCC provides academic transfer and some "light" vocational course offerings as does MPCC-McDonald-Belton Campus. As its name suggests, MPCC - Vocational-Technical

Division offers "heavy" technical and vocational programs such as auto-body, diesel mechanics, and electronics.

During the 1989-90 academic year, a problem arose when efforts to collect information for a North Central Accrediting Association (NCA) review of the MPTCCA colleges were, at times, slow and laborious because data were not readily available. At other points in the NCA self-study process, data were available, but had not been organized to display key relationships and meaningful trends.

In addition to information deficits encountered in the NCA self-study process, administrators at all levels of the Mid-Plains system frequently have encountered the problem of making a decision in a vacuum since the information needed was not available, or if present, could not be readily accessed. Therefore, assessing how to effectively organize the function of institutional research was of special concern to administrators in the Mid-Plains Technical Community College Area. The significance of this study was also underscored by the willing support and cooperation of the MPTCC Area President.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to assess how to effectively organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area. A careful literature review was conducted to determine how other two-year colleges organized the function of institutional research and what types of research data were most important to collect. The literature review also provided a conceptual framework

necessary to complete the institutional research questionnaire. When completed, results of the assessment were used to make recommendations regarding appropriate courses of action to organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCCA institutions.

This practicum is related to topics examined in the Governance and Management Seminar. A section of the study guide for this course deals with managing the flow of information in a post-secondary institution. Austin and others (1988:27) comment that "information is a key resource in management's making good decisions." Indeed, an organized institutional research function is a significant means by which relevant information can be produced.

Research Question

There was one research question central to this practicum. The question was as follows: What is an effective way, including considerations of staffing and kinds of information most needed, to organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area?

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A literature review was conducted to provide a conceptual framework for this study. "Institutional research," "research directors," "job analysis," "junior colleges," and "two-year colleges" were identifiers used to locate material in an IRS search. Also, periodical articles were secured through the help of the MCC library staff. The literature, thus reviewed, contained information about institutional research trends in two-year colleges, how such institutions have organized the function of research, and what types of research data were most important to collect. Knowledge derived from the literature review was also used to create the assessment instrument. This questionnaire was used to help assess possible staffing patterns and research priorities for the colleges of MPTCC Area.

Institutional Research: Trends

The literature examined contained information about how the institutional research function in at least some community colleges had been neglected. Cohen (1989:57) states, "The status of research on community colleges is that not nearly enough carefully monitored studies of the effects of policy or practice are being done." Similarly, Zeiss (1986:37) indicates, "too many colleges, it appears, have elected simply to be reactive institutions, without the

benefit of research-based supported data, which could foster a more anticipatory and active mode of operation." Cohen and Zeiss both note the absence of the research function in some community colleges, and Zeiss suggests the lack of "research-based" data makes decision making "reactive."

Community colleges that have established institutional research functions frequently used the data generated to enhance decision making. Slark (1989:1), in highlighting the research activities at Rancho Santiago College in California, says, "The program has matured over the years and developed into a maximally effective, integral part of the college management team, decision-making processes, and educational support programs." Similar convictions are voiced by Wright of Miami-Dade Community College (1985:1) when he says that "institutional research may be a highly visible force playing a significant role in both administrative and educational decision making." Lewis and others (1988:iii) again confirm the value of institutional research to decision makers:

> While it may seem that there is no room for research in a segment [of higher education] devoted almost exclusively to teaching and learning, community colleges, out of necessity, are taking the lead in a form of research known as institutional research. For many years, our colleges have suffered because policy makers were making intuitive judgments about our programs and students.

To summarize, Cohen (1989), Zeiss (1986), and Lewis et al. (1988) generally agree that institutional research is a support function which has long been neglected in many

two-year institutions but is slowly gaining momentum. Also, Slark (1989), Wright (1985) and Lewis et al. (1988) maintain that where institutional research has been developed, the research findings are most often used for decision making.

Organizational Patterns of Institutional Research

It appeared that those involved in institutional research frequently reported research findings to upper level administrators, in particular the chief executive officer (C.E.O.) of an institution. In an early but important study, Reichard and others (1982) surveyed all institutions belonging to the Association of Institutional Research. Based upon the responses of 334 persons employed in offices of institutional research, these writers (1982:5) conclude: "Approximately 25 percent of the offices reported directly to the President/Chancellor." This institutional research director - C.E.O. line of communication is noted by Slark (1989:2):

> The Director of Research and Planning reports to the chancellor, who is an advocate of institutional research not only as it exists to support administration but in its function as an integral support service for all levels and departments.

Other writers who highlight the relationship between institutional research personnel and upper-level administration, including the C.E.O., are Heverly (1989:3) and Reichard et al. (1982:27).

A number of writers note audiences other than the C.E.O. who utilize institutional research data. In an extensive internal study of personnel most likely to use

findings of Miami-Dade's institutional research office, Wright (1985:8) indicates that

> administrators and department chairpersons are using the services provided by institutional research. Administrators are using the information for staying abreast of research findings in general as well as for detailed information for decision-making; department chairpersons, on the other hand, are using the summary data to a greater extent and less detailed information.

Wright's study examines several aspects of research activity at Miami-Dade, but it appears that he is especially interested in how department chairpersons use information generated by the institutional research office.

Heverly (1989:3), mentioned earlier, notes that the Board of Trustees at Delaware County Community College often review the reports of the institutional research office. While she places more emphasis on the relationship between the institutional research office and the C.E.O., Slark (1987:7) also comments on the relationship between the research director and the Board of Trustees:

> Annually, the district Board of Trustees is made aware of new research agendas and progress achieved towards completion of agendas. Often, the Director of Research and Planning reports progress directly to the Board at scheduled meetings, and written updates and publications are sent to them frequently.

Another organizational pattern noted in the review of literature was the number of people working on institutional research within a given college system and their particular position on a line and staff chart. In their study, Reichard and others (1982:5) give some descriptive statistical data regarding the number of researchers working

in institutions that responded to their survey: "The number of FTE professional staff in the offices of institutional research ranged from .25 to 21.00 with a median of 2.0 FTE professional staff." These same writers (1982:27) comment on future staffing patterns in other institutions in this manner: "If past trends continue, one might expect the establishment of many more one person institutional research offices in community colleges which report directly to the President."

Wright (1985:1-2) explains that Miami-Dade's institutional research office began in 1964 with "a director and one secretary" and has now grown to an office employing "six professional researchers, three paraprofessionals, two full-time assigned programmers and five clerical support positions." Another indication of a staffing pattern for an institutional research function is provided by Slark (1989:8) of Ranch Santiago College: "Regular full-time college-funded institutional research staff includes the Director and an administrative secretary." Slark adds that the staff also includes "up to an additional twelve part-time or grant-funded employees" who perform a variety of duties.

In addition to the number of people employed in offices of institutional research, the preceding paragraphs contain information about whom it is that conducts the research. As suggested by Reichard and others (1982) and Slark (1989), a Director of Institutional Research aided by a few support

staff is not an uncommon pattern. In a recent review of institutional research in California's community colleges, editors Lewis and Barr (1988:2) conclude as follows:

> Many organizational forms are being used successfully in California community colleges. However, there are three basic forms: the institutional research and planning office, the institutional research committee, and individual and group research.

Thus, the literature concerning organizational patterns of institutional research contained what appeared to be several trends:

1. In a number of institutions, the director of institutional research reported directly to the C.E.O.
2. In some institutions, the primary audience for research findings was the C.E.O., but secondary audiences included other upper level administrators, as well as, divisional and department chairpersons. In some cases, members of Board of Trustees were an important audience for research findings.
3. A Director of Institutional Research aided by one or two secretaries was a somewhat common staffing pattern.

Categories of Institutional Research Data

Writers of the literature reviewed do not always agree on ways of dividing (and naming) the categories of institutional research being collected. For example, Cohen (1989:57) suggests that there are two broad areas:

"Educational research takes two fundamental forms: status studies and studies purporting to change practice." Reichard and others (1982:12) note that "baccalaureate and two-year institutions tended to be more involved in environmental analysis studies and in analyzing student outcomes and program demands." In making these comments Reichard and others thus identify three areas frequently examined by two-year and some four-year institutions.

Writers Heverly (1989) and Wright (1985) cite more than three but fewer than six categories of institutional research being performed in two-year institutions. Heverly (1988:8-9), of Delaware County Community College, describes a model that contains four subdivisions of research: (1) market demand; (2) resources; (3) academic performance; and (4) outcomes. Heverly (1988:8-9) explains that market demand includes student, employer, and transfer institution requirements; and resources involve assessments of faculty/staff, facilities/service, and students. Academic performance concerns areas such as retention, G.P.A., graduation rates, and returning second-year students; outcomes includes placement rates, number of students transferring, median full-time salary, and employer's evaluation of college programs. Wright (1985:10) indicates five areas of institutional research being performed at Miami-Dade: (1) Student/enrollment profiles; (2) Placement and Follow-up Reports; (3) Standards of Academic Progress; (4) Basic Skills Assessment; and (5) CLAST Research Reports.

The first four categories are not uncommon in the literature; Wright does not specify the nature of the fifth category.

Frydenberg (1988) identifies four major types of institutional research, but further subdivides the second category. In so doing, a somewhat more complex framework is created. Frydenberg (1989:3) begins with a general overview:

> The types of research currently being done may be divided into the following four main areas according to the purpose of the studies: external reporting, self-improvement (formative research), program decision-making (essentially cause/effect), and public relations and marketing.

The first of the areas mentioned above, external reporting, concerns reports which must be filed regularly with state agencies or regional accreditation commissions. Frydenberg asserts:

> In response to a decade of intense public scrutiny of the community colleges through questions relating to their accountability as publicly funded learning institutions, institutional research is now turning to not only supplying the question-makers with data, but also seeking to shape the policies of those political decision making bodies (1989:5).

Frydenberg provides several subdivisions within the second broad category, self-improvement. Self-improvement is subdivided in this manner: (1) efficiency studies - such as cost of teacher-student ratios, energy usage, and use of facility space; (2) effectiveness/outcome studies - how students perform after they leave; (3) needs assessment studies - determination of potential students, demographics;

and (4) faculty and staff development (Frydenberg, 1989:8-15).

To complete the framework of types of institutional research, Frydenberg (1989) adds a third and fourth category. The third category is that of "decision making for program development" which the writer conceptualizes in this manner: "The major divisional areas are in the distinction of short-term studies for immediate decision making versus long-term studies for future planning" (Frydenberg, 1989:17). Frydenberg's fourth and final category is that of "public relations and marketing" (1989:19-20).

Slark (1989:6-7), cited earlier in this review, identifies five types of research conducted at Rancho Santiago College in California:

> The agenda always includes the few studies that are completed regularly or on an annual basis. For example, students, demographics, enrollment trends and student characteristics, retention, and student outcomes.

In addition to these, research efforts are often directed at "staff development and communication activities related to research" and "accreditation/self-study support" (Slark, 1989:7).

Based upon the literature examined, there appeared to be a wide variety of institutional research data being collected by two-year post-secondary institutions. The writers cited in this review did not classify the types or

categories of research in the same way; however, there did appear to be some common groupings which were the following:

1. public relations, market demand, demographic trends;
2. assessment of resources - including adequacy of full-time faculty, facilities, and funding;
3. evaluation of academic performance - including such areas as retention, graduation rates, and number of returning second year students;
4. outcomes - including placement rates, number of students transferring, and employers' evaluations of college programs;
5. student enrollment profiles;
6. basic skills assessment;
7. external reports - including reports for state agencies, reports to secure federal grants, and completion of independent surveys;
8. research on faculty/staff development activities; and
9. institutional self-studies for regional accreditation purposes.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Several procedures were used to complete this practicum. As mentioned earlier, the basic research question to be answered was the following: What is an effective way, including considerations of staffing and kinds of information most, to organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area? In providing an answer to this question, the study involved the methodology of assessment and then evaluation based upon the results of the assessment.

An extended search of literature was conducted to provide a conceptual framework for the study. Special attention was given to literature which focused upon how institutional research functions were organized and the kinds of data which were most often collected.

A transmittal letter and questionnaire were developed (see Appendices A and B). Several administrators were consulted during the questionnaire development process to assure a valid and reliable tool for data collection. After the tool was developed, the MPTCC Area President, Chief Executive Officer for the Area, validated and attested to the reliability of the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

A total of thirty administrators representing McCook Community College, Mid-Plains McDonald-Belton Campus, Mid-Plains Vocational Technical Campus, and the Mid-Plains Area Office were designated by the MPTCCA Area President to participate in this study. Administrators, thus designated, received a questionnaire and a stamped return envelope. Names of administrators receiving the questionnaire were recorded and the questionnaires were numerically coded. After two-weeks, follow-up phone calls were made to help insure at least an eighty-five percent response rate. This percentage allowed maximum generalizations to be made.

Descriptive statistics were used for analysis of data because this study was descriptive and not inferential. Results were reported in tabular format. A report containing recommendations for improvement of educational practice was given to the MPTCC Area President upon completion of the study.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this practicum, a definition of the term "institutional research" included research which was conducted at the two-year college level. The research was completed for a variety of purposes including but not limited to providing data for: external reporting, institutional self studies, program decision-making, and public relations and marketing.

Assumptions

There were a number of assumptions applicable to this study. One assumption was that the questionnaire was a valid and reliable tool and would gather data relevant to the purpose of this study. Another assumption was that the headings and sub-headings on the questionnaire would be reasonably clear and understandable to respondents. It was also assumed that administrators responding to the questionnaire were employed in the MPTCC Area long enough to have gained a general working knowledge of the various institutions within the system. Additionally it was assumed an eighty-five percent response rate of the group sampled would provide an adequate information base. Finally, any category of research deemed "Important" by at least three-fourths of the respondents was assumed to be a "priority" item.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations inherent in this study. First, the category of research "basic skills assessment" was not determined until the completion of the extended review of literature and thus was not included on the questionnaire. Second, responses to the questionnaire may not contain all of the data relevant to the formation of an effective institutional research function in the MPTCC Area. Another limitation was that some administrators may have been new to the system, been given a new assignment, or

may have had such a limited scope of responsibility that they did not possess a general working knowledge of the entire MPTCC system. Fourth, the assessment outcomes, conclusions and recommendations were not intended to be generalized for application at other two-year colleges. Fifth, actual implementation of practicum recommendations may be limited by budget concerns.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The literature review was completed and organized around three concepts: (1) institutional research trends in two-year colleges; (2) how two-year colleges have organized the function of institutional research; and (3) what types of research data were most important to collect. The review of literature thus contained information necessary for the creation of the survey instrument.

The survey instrument was mailed to thirty administrators representing MCC, MPCC-VTD, MPCC-MB, and the Mid-Plains Area Office. Of the thirty administrators, twenty-nine responded which generated a response rate of 96.7 percent.

What follows is a description of how the twenty-nine administrators responded to various items on the instrument. The description is divided into two sections: (1) a narrative section that contains two general questions and administrators' responses to those questions; and (2) a section containing three tables which depict administrators' responses to questions asked under survey headings "External Reporting," "Institutional Improvement," and "Marketing and Public Relations."

The first general question asked was "In your opinion, is there a need to organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area?" Twenty-two administrators representing 75.9 percent of the total responded "Yes." The "No" response was marked by six administrators which represented 20.7 percent of the total. Of the twenty-nine administrators, one, representing 3.4 percent, did not respond to this question.

Question two was as follows: "When organized, which staffing pattern would be most appropriate to the function of institutional research?" Of the twenty-nine who returned surveys, three representing 10.3 percent, checked "One Area Office Staff Person." The "One Area Office Staff Person With Designated Campus Contacts" option received fourteen markings representing 48.3 percent of the total. Option three, "Individual Campus Institutional Research Personnel," was checked eleven times representing 37.9 percent of the total. One administrator did not check any of the available options, representing 3.4 percent of the total.

What follows is a series of three tables which display the results of three categories of assessment which, as of yet, have not been discussed. In each table, there is a number and percentage of administrators who responded either I (important), S (somewhat important), or U (unimportant) for each topical area. Each topic appears in ranked order with the topic receiving the greatest number of "I" responses appearing at the top of the table, the topic

receiving the next highest number of "I" responses below it and so on. The number of respondents in each horizontal series (ISU) equals twenty-nine and the percentage equals 100.

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Responses to External Reporting Category

Topic	Important		Somewhat important		Un-important	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Providing data to influence state legislation	22	75.9	7	24.1	0	0.0
2. Research to secure federal grants	21	72.4	8	27.6	0	0.0
3. Independent surveys, doctoral surveys	3	10.3	15	51.7	11	37.9

Table 1 contains data which permits the topics (based upon the number of "I" responses) to be ranked from first place through third place: (1) providing data to influence legislation - first rank at 75.9 percent; (2) research to secure federal grants - second rank at 72.4 percent; and (3) independent surveys, doctoral surveys - third rank at 10.3 percent. It should be noted that this third subdivision did receive fifteen "somewhat important" markings for a percentage of 51.7.

Table 2

Number and Percentage of Response to Institutional Improvement Category

Topic	Important		Somewhat important		Unimportant	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Needs Assessment	28	96.6	1	3.4	0	0.0
2. Effectiveness/ outcomes Studies	23	79.3	6	20.7	0	0.0
3. Faculty, administrator staff development	18	62.1	11	37.9	0	0.0
4. Efficiency studies	18	62.1	10	34.5	1	3.4
5. Studies of institutional climate	14	48.3	15	51.7	0	0.0

Data related to the topic "Institutional Improvement" is displayed in Table 2. Under this heading, five sub-topics were listed, and these topics were ranked from the one receiving the greatest number of "I" responses (top of table) to the one receiving the smallest number (bottom of table). The survey subtopics thus received the following ranking and percentages: (1) needs assessments - first rank at 96.6 percent; (2) effectiveness/outcomes studies - second rank at 79.3 percent; (3) faculty, administrator, staff development - third rank at 62.1 percent; (4) efficiency

studies - third rank at 62.1 percent; and (5) studies of institutional climate - fifth rank at 48.3 percent. While both staff development and efficiency studies were ranked in third place based upon the number of "I" responses, it was noted that staff development received no "U" markings in contrast to efficiency studies which received one. Also, while receiving only 48.3 percent of the "I" markings climate studies did receive 51.7 percent of the "S" markings and no "U" markings.

Data gathered for the survey topic "Marketing and Public Relations" appears in Table 3. There were two subtopics, "market surveys," and "public relations." The public relations subtopic (satisfaction with services delivered) was ranked first with an "I" percentage of 82.8. Market surveys (interest in programs available) received second ranking with an "I" percentage of 75.9.

Table 3

Number and Percentage of Responses to Marketing and Public Relations Category

Topic	Important		Somewhat important		Un-important	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Public Relations	24	82.8	4	13.8	1	3.4
2. Market Surveys	22	75.9	6	20.7	1	3.4

Thus, the following types of institutional research received an "Important" rating by at least three-fourths of the administrators who responded: (1) needs assessments - 96.6 percent; (2) public relations - 82.8 percent; (3) effectiveness/outcomes - 79.3 percent; (4) data to influence legislation - 75.9 percent; and (5) market surveys - 75.9 percent.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The results of this practicum were related to the purpose which was to assess how to effectively organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area. Through a methodical process of surveying thirty key administrators identified by the MPTCC Area President, the research question which concerned patterns of staffing and kinds of research information perceived as being most necessary was, for the most part, answered.

Administrators' responses thus provided information necessary to begin developing the institutional research function. Information about whether or not the function of institutional research should be organized was derived from one general question. A second general question was created to help determine appropriate staffing patterns in the MPTCC Area. Information concerning the types research administrators viewed as being most important was gathered through a series of related questions. It should be noted, however, that any conclusions, implications, and recommendations derived from the assessment results must be tempered by the assumptions and limitations cited earlier in this document.

The literature review was related to the purpose of the study in four ways. First, it was established through the literature review that the function of institutional research has just begun to develop in many community colleges, although there appeared to be a number which had had the function for more than fifteen years. Furthermore, institutional research personnel viewed one of their major purposes to be the providing of timely information to administrators for decision-making.

Second, the literature was of value because it contained information about organizational patterns of institutional research. Organizational patterns of special interest were those involving personnel and to whom they reported research findings. The relationship between the director of institutional research and C.E.O. appeared to be of critical importance.

Third, several categories of institutional research data were derived from a careful examination of the literature. Many of the categories involved various kinds of assessments of an on-going nature. However, external reporting to state and federal agencies was also a task performed by institutional research personnel.

Finally, as mentioned earlier in this study, the literature review contained the information necessary to develop the survey instrument. In particular, information concerning the staffing of institutional research offices was incorporated into the survey instrument. Also,

information about the different types of institutional research being conducted was of special significance to the questionnaire development process.

Conclusions

Two general conclusions were formed from the first two survey questions. The first conclusion was derived from question one which concerned the need for organizing the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area. Since slightly over three-fourths of the administrators marked "yes," it was concluded there was opinion which favored organizing the function.

The second question concerned which staffing pattern was perceived as being most appropriate to the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area. Nearly one-half of the administrators favored the "One Area Office Staff Person With Designated Campus Contacts" option. Slightly over a third of the administrators supported "Individual Campus Institutional Research Personnel." While there was not a strong sense of direction established by the responses to this question, it appeared that administrators favored the centralized option with campus contacts as mentioned above.

Administrators' responses to questions about the types of institutional research most needed provided the basis for a number of somewhat more focused conclusions. Conclusions thus drawn concerned three general categories of research

activity: (1) external reporting; (2) institutional improvement; and (3) marketing and public relations.

Under the first heading, "External Reporting," the subtopic "Providing data to influence legislation" was marked "Important" by slightly over three-fourths of the respondents, and the sub-topic "Research to secure federal grants" received support from just under three-fourths of the administrators. Based upon the strength of the responses, there appeared to be substantial interest in potential data generated by these research activities. It was concluded that there was somewhat less interest in the third sub-topic, "Independent surveys, doctoral surveys."

The second area, "Institutional improvement," contained five sub-topics. Administrators were highly supportive of "Needs assessments" since almost 100 percent of the administrators checked the item as being "Important." More that three-fourths of the administrators marked "Effectiveness/outcomes studies" as being "Important," thus it was concluded there was substantial interest in the kinds of potential data resulting from this type of research. Almost two-thirds of the respondents favored research efforts in the areas of "Faculty, administrator, staff development" and "Efficiency studies." Upon careful consideration of the data relating to these two topics, it appeared that "Faculty, administrator, staff development may have been favored slightly over "Efficiency studies." The final subtopic, "Studies of institutional climate" was not

favored as heavily by the number of "important" responses, but it did receive slightly over half of the "somewhat important" markings. Climate studies were thus concluded to be of moderate importance.

A final type of institutional research category was "Marketing and Public Relations." It was concluded that administrators were highly supportive of research efforts in both of the sub-topics contained within this category. The strongest response was elicited by the "Public relations" option followed by "Market surveys." In both cases, over three-fourths of respondents marked "Important."

Implications

Several implications became apparent upon careful review of the conclusions drawn in response to the two general questions. First, administrators, for the most part, favored the idea of organizing the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area. Of the staffing options listed, "One Area Office Staff Person With Designated Campus Contacts" received the highest ratings. However, there did appear to be a degree of support for the "Individual Campus Institutional Research Personnel" option. An implication of this slightly mixed response would be that if the centralized staffing option (listed above) is considered, significant authority and responsibility be delegated to the three Campus Institutional Research Contacts. Ability to fund the institutional research

position would also be a significant implication to be considered by the MPTCC Area Board.

Patterns of responses to the questions under the topical headings "External Reporting," "Institutional Improvement," and "Marketing and Public Relations" also generated helpful implications. For example, in the area of external reporting, administrators appeared quite interested in research activities which generated information that could be used to influence legislation. Also, research operations which helped to secure federal grant monies was an item receiving good support. It is possible that both of these topics elicited positive administrative responses because of a general perception that, in these areas, more needs to be accomplished.

A number of implications followed the conclusions established in the second category, "Institutional Improvement." Needs assessments in terms of potential students and relevant demographic trends received an extremely strong, positive administrative response. The strength of this response marks this item "top priority" as an area of research. Also, effectiveness/outcomes studies elicited a very positive ranking, making such research efforts another strong priority. Research sub-topics reflecting fairly strong emphasis were staff development, efficiency studies. Of the five sub-topics, institutional climate studies received the lowest "Important" percentage, 48.3, but commanded a "Somewhat Important" percentage of

51.7. Although climate studies ranked fifth, it appeared that administrators did want some of the information which could be gleaned through such research efforts.

Administrators viewed topics under the heading "Marketing and Public Relations" as being a strong priority area for a potential institutional research department. Of the two sub-topics, "public relations" received a slightly higher percentage than did "market surveys." One implication related to this area would be the need to coordinate the efforts of institutional research personnel and public relations and marketing staff who were already operating at the time of this study.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made as a direct result of this practicum:

1. It is recommended that the Area President disseminate information as contained in this practicum to appropriate administrators.
2. It is also recommended that the information contained in this practicum be disseminated to the MPTCC Area's Board Personnel Committee.
3. It is further recommended that this committee in conjunction with the Board's Finance Committee give careful consideration to establishing and funding a Director of Institutional Research position in the MPTCC Area Office.

4. In the event such a position becomes a reality, another recommendation would be that a Campus Contact be designated for each of the three campuses.

5. Based on the findings of this study, the following areas should receive first priority as topics of institutional research:

    a. needs assessments;
    b. public relations;
    c. effectiveness/outcomes studies;
    d. research to influence legislation; and
    e. market surveys.

When feasible, efforts should be coordinated with public relations and marketing staff who are already operating.

5. It is recommended that the following topics be given second priority as areas to be examined by those individuals in charge of research:

    a. research to secure federal grants;
    b. faculty, administrator, staff development;
    c. efficiency studies;
    d. studies of institutional climate; and
    e. independent surveys, doctoral surveys.

6. Foundational knowledge necessary to organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area has been gathered in this practicum.

However, the function of institutional research is indeed a complex one. Therefore, it is recommended that additional study and consideration be given to topics such as:

a. position descriptions for institutional research personnel;

b. budget estimates for the entire institutional research function;

c. how best to manage the flow of information;

d. appropriate computer systems; and

e. how best to disseminate the research information.

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APPENDIX A

TRANSMITTAL LETTER

MID-PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
MID-PLAINS
TECHNICAL COMMUNITY
COLLEGE AREA
McCOOK COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Dear Administrator/Supervisor:

Mr. Ford Craig is doing the following practicum: "An Assessment of How to Organize Effectively the Function of Institution Research in the Mid-Plains Community College Area."

The Mid-Plains Technical Community College Area needs to address this issue. Mr. Craig has reviewed the literature on the subject. He has developed a survey instrument to be distributed to an identified group of people holding administrative and supervisory positions in the area. You are one of those selected to respond to the survey.

As Area President, I encourage you to complete the survey immediately and return it to Mr. Craig. This will assure Mr. Craig a good response to his survey. The information gathered from the survey will assist Mr. Craig in writing his paper.

Sincerely,

Dr. William G. Hasemeyer

Dr. William G. Hasemeyer
Area President

MID-PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Route 4, Box 1, I-80 & Hwy 83
North Platte, Nebraska 69101
308-532-8740

AREA OFFICE
416 North Jeffers
North Platte, Nebraska 69101
308-534-9265

McCOOK COMMUNITY COLLEGE
1205 East 3rd Street
McCook, Nebraska 69001
308-345-6303

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire
Survey to Assist in Determining Organization of
the Institutional Research Function in the MPTCC Area

I. In your opinion, is there a need to organize the function of institutional research in the MPTCC Area?
( ) Yes
( ) No

II. When organized, which staffing pattern would be most appropriate to the function of institutional research?
( ) One Area Office Staff Person
( ) One Area Office Staff Person With Designated Campus Contacts
( ) Individual Campus Institutional Research Personnel

III. What types of institutional research are most needed?
Please circle one response per item.
I= important S= somewhat important U= unimportant

A. External reporting

1. Providing data to influence state legislation	I	S	U
2. Research to secure federal grants	I	S	U
3. Independent surveys, doctoral surveys	I	S	U

B. Institutional improvement

1. Efficiency studies (examples: energy usage, use of part-time faculty, use of facilities, load index studies)	I	S	U
2. Effectiveness/outcomes studies (examples: follow-up studies on students as they transfer or secure jobs, retention studies)	I	S	U
3. Needs assessment (examples: who are potential students? what are area population trends? classes to be offered?)	I	S	U
4. Faculty, administrator, staff development - what works, what is being done-?)	I	S	U
5. Studies of institutional climate (work attitudes, job satisfaction)	I	S	U

C. Marketing and Public Relations

1. Market surveys (interest in programs and various services available)	I	S	U
2. Public relations (satisfaction with services delivered)	I	S	U

Please return to: Ford M. Craig
McCook Community College
1205 East 3rd Street
McCook, NE 69001

by_____

ERIC Clearinghouse for
Junior Colleges

JAN 25 1991